# Transformational Leadership of Nurse Managers as Perceived by Registered Nurses, in Divisional Hospitals, The Republic of Fiji

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Leadership style of nurse managers play an important role on registered nurses' retention and organizational productivity thru quality nursing care which is costly to healthcare organizations. This study intends to examine registered nurse's overall perception of transformational leadership and its related factors of nurse manager in divisional hospitals, The Republic of Fiji.

**Method:** This descriptive study included 348 nurses selected from 3 divisional hospitals in The Republic of Fiji. Random proportional stratified sampling was used. Research instruments consisted of demographic data form, and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data.

**Results:** Response rate was 73% where majority 223 (91%) were females and 21 (9%) were male respondents. Transformational leadership was rated at a moderate level ($\bar{x}$ = 49.68, SD = 18.31). The seven factors related to transformational leadership namely (i) management by exception; (ii) inspiration motivation; (iii) idealized influence; (iv) individualized consideration; (v) intellectual stimulation; (vi) contingent reward; and (vii) laissez-fair were also rated at a moderate level.

**Conclusion:** This research contributes to the literature on nurse mangers leadership styles wherein transformational leadership style employed by nurse managers was perceived by registered nurses at a moderate level in this study setting. Baseline information has been elicited for nursing policy makers' consideration to promote transformational leadership and conduct further research.

*Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Nurse Managers; Divisional Hospitals; Registered Nurses*

## Introduction

Transformational leadership is a vital aspect for any organizations' productivity and survival. Downton [1] firstly coined the term transformational leadership, Burns [2] conceptualized and published that it involves "one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things" (p. 19), this was further developed by Bass [3]. Hence, Bass 'transformational leadership theory is frequently referred to in the literature (Choi, Goh, Adam and Tan, 2016).

Literatures attest that transformational leaders encourage and facilitate those under their charge to do more than expected thru creation of self-awareness on the importance of the task they do, empowering them to utilize their strengths to meet the goals of the organization and increasing their high-level needs [3]. Literature posit that such leaders were good at influencing their subordinates to

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focus on collective interest rather self- interest [4], enhanced employee performance, trust, and commitment in hierarchical organizations [5-7], promote team work thru collaboration, consultation, and consensus decisions [8], empowering employees to perform to their full potential [9] while Cummings and colleagues [10] attested such leaders were visionary for the organizations' future, shared that vision with others had the ability to stimulate and inspire followers to exceed their own self-interests for a higher purpose.

Dimensions of transformational leadership as conceptualized by Bass and Avolio [11] were: (i) idealized influence - related to charisma, role modelling, ability to lead, have high moral and ethical conduct and are admired by their followers who want to emulate them [3,12,13], (ii) inspirational motivation - these refer to leaders who stimulate and build confidence in their workers [14] are able to inspire and build commitment and clearly communicate the vison (s) and goal (s) of the organization [12,15], (iii) intellectual situation - described as the ability of the leader to arouse their followers to be challenge their ways of thinking and values and become more creative and in problem solving skills [3], the subordinates participate in group decision making and are innovative [15,16] and (iv) individualized consideration - promotes and strengthens positive relationship between a leader and each follower [3]. Thru this relationship the leader is able to understand the subordinate and is able to provide feedback better and act as a mentor [12] thus developing the subordinate to perform better to also become transformational leader.

Transactional leadership which is when a person connects with another for the sole purpose of meeting specific goals (Aarons, 2006) in return for some type of reward or praise (Bass., *et al.* 2003) is also captured in the Multifactor Leadership questionnaire (MLQ) form 6S - the instrument that measure transformational leadership. Dimensions include (i) contingent rewards - is the agreement between leaders and followers on organizational objectives to be accomplished [12] and select motivating rewards (Bass., *et al.* 2003) where leader and subordinate set the task outcomes for the follower so as to receive rewards and not punishment [3] and (ii) management-by-exception - includes active management by exception where the leader sets the objective of the task then monitors the followers job, to look for errors or nonconformities then corrects the error enforces rules and procedures while passive management by exception is where the leader let the employee do the job and react when there is a mistake [12] or wait for untoward reports regarding the employee be brought to their attention [16]. Lastly, Laissez-faire leadership also captured in the (MLQ) form 6S is described as ineffective leadership [14], where the leader does not interact with members of the organization (Sadler, 2003) and is not keen to contribute to the development of the follower [13].

Nursing leadership is part of nursing management [17] and should not be viewed as an optional role for nurse managers [18]. Porter-O'Grady and Malloch [19] affirmed that transformational leaders created environments that facilitated their followers to perform to their full potential thus improve organizations' performance; Kavanaugh., *et al.* [20] and Roberts-Turner and colleagues [21] found that transformational leadership positively impacted nurses job satisfaction; while Upenieks [22] asserted that transformational leadership depicts dimensions that enhance support staff nurses that nurse managers should take into consideration. Recently, transformational leadership was perceived at a moderate level in Saudi Arabia [23] it was suggested that nurse managers in the study setting were task oriented, emphasized on work assignments being done on time and relied on incentives both positive and negative to influence nurses' work.

In The Republic of Fiji nursing leadership began with their British colonizers who sought Ms. Webberburn a student of Florence Nightingale in the 1860s to formally establish the nursing profession. The need for nursing leadership in the early years saw the inclusion of a New Zealand tailored nursing curriculum whose graduates were to hold leadership and management roles in health facilities around the country. Currently nursing management is included in undergraduate courses and in nursing leadership and management courses offered at post graduate level. There is a dearth of studies on nursing leadership styles or transformational leadership done in the Republic of Fiji. However, a predictive study on factors that enhance nurse's organizational commitment found that leadership style

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was not significantly correlated, the least and a negative predictor [24]. This will be the first study on nurse managers' transformational leadership conducted in The Republic of Fiji, and as asserted, healthcare managers must understand the impact of their leadership styles so that the organization they lead has a positive culture and is committed to meet the challenges within (ANA, 2013). Therefore, this study will examine transformational leadership of nurse managers as perceived by registered nurses in divisional hospitals in The Republic of Fiji.

## Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) for this study was derived from the literature review and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 6S where the seven (7) factors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, contingent reward, management-by-exception, and laissez-faire leadership helped guide the study.
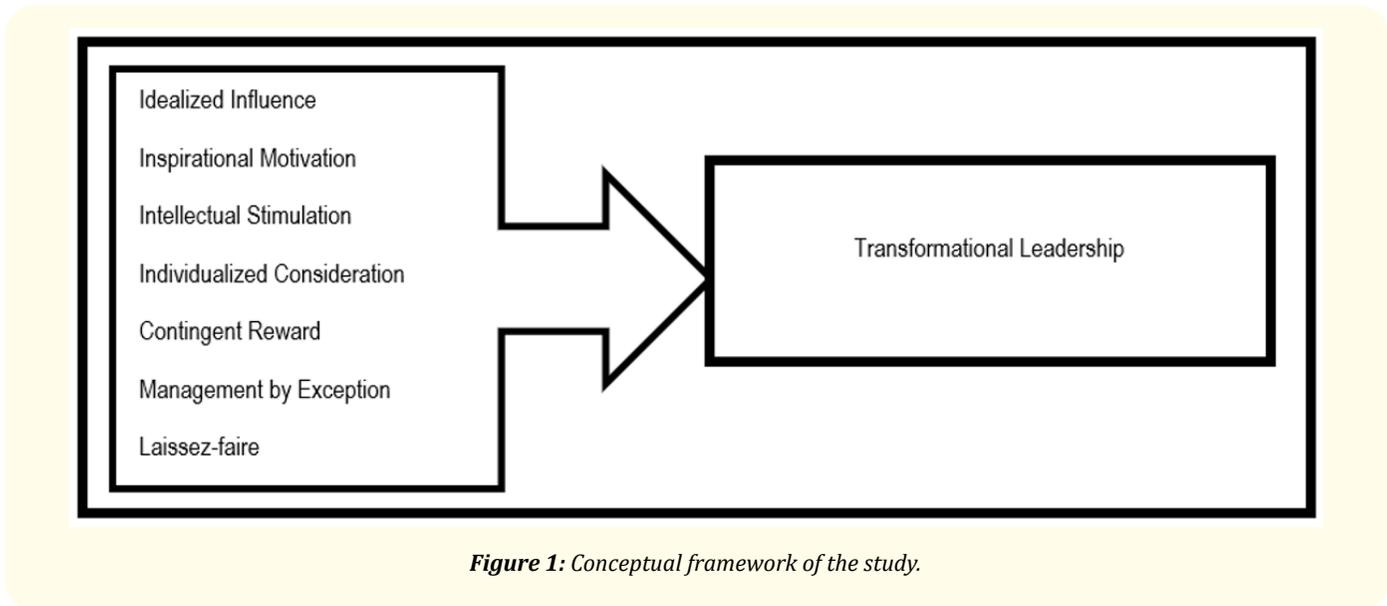


*Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study.*

## Method

### Design, sampling and setting

A descriptive design was employed, that recruited 336 nurses calculated using Yamane's [25] formula and a twenty percent (20%) added to the sample size to cater for attrition [26,27] then proportional stratified random sampling was done in the three divisional hospitals namely CWMH, LTKH and LBSH.

### Data collection

Instruments used were the demographic data form that was developed by the researchers and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) form 6S developed Bass and Avolio [28] a 21 item 5 point Likert-type scale where the seven factors related to transformational were included. Questionnaires were distributed to the sample and collection was done over a four (4) weeks period.

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Ethical approval and consent to participate.

Ethical approval was granted by the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences thru the Fiji National University research ethics committee; return of questionnaires implied consent.

## Statistical analysis

Returned questionnaires were checked for completeness, analysis used SPSs software (SPSS Windows, version 21.0, SPSS Chicago IL, USA). Descriptive statistics was used to summarize demographic data using counts and percentages the overall scores for transformational leadership and its seven related factors were analyzed using mean, range and standard deviation.

## Results

Of the responses 244 (73%) were valid for analysis. Table 1 presents the demographics of the studied sample in the three (3) divisional hospitals. Female nurses represented 91% of the respondents. The largest in department tenure were the 1 to 5 years (68.90%), the age group mostly represented were the 25 to 29 years of age (31.10%), most had worked as a registered nurse for less than 10 years (59.40%), and most (96.7%) did the eight (8) hour shift.

| Characteristic of Subjects | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 21 | 8.60 |
| Female | 223 | 91.40 |
| Total | 244 | |
| **Age (years)** | | |
| 20 - 24 | 41 | 16.80 |
| 25 - 29 | 76 | 31.10 |
| 30 - 34 | 46 | 18.90 |
| 35 - 39 | 37 | 15.20 |
| 40 - 44 | 27 | 11.10 |
| 45 - 49 | 13 | 5.30 |
| 50 - 54 | 4 | 1.60 |
| **Working Experience (years)** | | |
| 1 - 4 | 82 | 33.60 |
| 5 - 9 | 63 | 25.80 |
| 10 - 14 | 43 | 17.60 |
| 15 - 19 | 31 | 12.70 |
| 20 - 24 | 17 | 7.00 |
| 25 - 29 | 7 | 2.90 |
| 30 + | 1 | 0.40 |
| **Department Tenure (years)** | | |
| 1 - 4 | 144 | 59.00 |
| 5 - 9 | 68 | 27.90 |
| 10 - 14 | 21 | 8.60 |
| 15 - 19 | 8 | 3.30 |
| 20 - 24 | 3 | 1.20 |

*Table 1: Summary of the characteristics of sampled nurses.*

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Table 2 displays the scoring of the factors related to transformation leadership as per MLQ Form 6S in descending order where all were perceived at a moderate level.

| TL factors | Mean | Range | Level of TL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Management by exception | 7.89 | 1 - 12 | Moderate |
| Inspirational motivation | 7.58 | 1 - 12 | Moderate |
| Idealized influence | 7.05 | 1 - 12 | Moderate |
| Individualized consideration | 6.89 | 1 - 12 | Moderate |
| Intellectual stimulation | 6.82 | 1 - 12 | Moderate |
| Contingent reward | 6.81 | 1 - 12 | Moderate |
| Laissez-faire | 6.48 | 1 - 12 | Moderate |

*Table 2: Summary of factors related to transformational leadership.*

The overall level of perception of transformational leadership taken from mean range was at a moderate level ( = 49.68, SD = 18.31), perception of TL from the various units was also at a moderate level along with the overall perception as per divisional hospital (Table 3).

| | (Mean) | Range | Level of Tl |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Transformational Leadership** | 49.68 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |
| **Transformational Leadership as perceived by units** | | | |
| Other units | 37.59 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |
| Maternity | 36.99 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |
| Surgical | 36.94 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |
| ICUEDOT | 36.90 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |
| Medical | 36.70 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |
| Paediatric | 31.55 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |
| **Transformational leadership as perceived by each divisional hospital** | | | |
| LBSH | 44.64 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |
| CWMH | 33.32 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |
| LTKH | 32.45 | 0 - 84 | Moderate |

*Table 3: Overall summary of transformational leadership, per unit and hospitals.*

## Discussion

Transformational leadership was perceived at a moderate level by registered nurses in the Republic of Fiji. This result mirrored that of Asri and colleagues [23] in Saudi Arabia were transformational leadership was 'not displayed at an ideal level' suggesting that nurse managers were task oriented. On the other hand, the results differed from most of the earlier studies and that of Bass and Avolio [28] who conceptualized transformational leadership.

The present study was conducted at such time when the nursing organization was undergoing reforms in terms of job promotions where by an Open Merit System (OMRIS) was introduced that saw some nurse managers losing their positions to new candidates.

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The introduction of the open merit system could have influenced existing nurse managers to be more concerned with achieving the goals of the organization on which they would be assessed rather than displaying vital factors of transformational leadership. This was evidenced by management by exception - where nurse managers set the objective of the task and the followers do the job which is a form of transactional leadership [12,16] though at a moderate level was perceived the highest score in this study.

The factors of transformational leadership namely idealized influence, inspirational influence, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation were also perceived at a moderate level. These factors though important would require nurse managers to be trained on how to display them and if they were trained it does require some quality time to be spent on a group and individually with their followers. As aforementioned the changes within the organization time constrained nurse managers from exhibiting the vital factors of transformational leadership.

The study results indicated that nurses who worked in 'Other units' perceived the highest score though still at a moderate level. Other units included nurses who worked in clinics and only did the 8 am to 4.30 pm shift. This meant they stayed with their nurse managers most of the shift, there was a set team throughout the working days and communication within the team and with their nurse managers was enhanced. However, caution must be applied because the difference in scores with maternity, surgical and ICUEDOT is minimal. Additionally, most of participants in this study were a young generation of nurses of less than thirty (30) years old and majority with a tenure of less than ten (10) years in their respective units and this could have influenced their perception of their nurse manager's leadership style.

In summary, the findings of this study show that transformational leadership was perceived at a moderate level and management by exception an aspect of transactional leadership was scored the highest indicating degrees of task oriented leadership. Also, changes or reforms that occur within the organization does impact on nurse manager's leadership styles [29].

### Strengths, Limitations and Areas for Further Research

To our understanding this is the first study on nurse manager's transformational leadership style conducted in the Republic of Fiji that had a 73% response rate. The strength of this study lies within its positivist paradigm where the study aimed to examine the collective perception of registered nurses on their nurse manager's transformational leadership. Limitations of this study is that it only considered nurses in hospitals and not those in the specialized hospitals, private hospitals, sub-divisional hospitals, public health settings and industry nurses. A replication of the study to different settings is advisable to gauge the generalizability of the findings to all nurses working In the Republic of Fiji. Future research should also consider a Constructivist Paradigm - Qualitative Approach to gain an in-depth understanding of registered nurses perception of transformational leadership from a Fijian context and the results can be used to inform or confirm the present study findings.

### Conclusion and Implications of the Study

The study aimed to examine registered nurse's perception of their nurse manager's leadership style. Transformational leadership was aggregately perceived at a moderate level wherein management by exception was perceived highly. The current study builds on existing literature on nurse's transformational leadership. Nursing leaders and relevant stakeholders could use the findings from this study as baseline information to enhance transformational leadership thru training, strategizing and policy tailoring and future research.

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